

RECRUITING THE FUTURE FORCE: A PROACTIVE APPROACH

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

RECRUITING THE FUTURE FORCE: A PROACTIVE APPROACH

by

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The Department of Defense (DoD) plays a critical role in the national security strategy of the United States, and the military's success is predicated on recruiting highly qualified applicants to fulfill this vital mission. For almost forty years the all volunteer force (AVF) proved a remarkably successful approach to manning the most effective and dominant military in history. Today, however, the concept of a volunteer force is stressed as never before. Nearly a decade of protracted conflict, increasing deficiencies in our public education system and nearly epidemic obesity among our nation's youth provide a new set of challenges to our recruiting force. Currently recruiting efforts focus on a passive strategy; simply extracting the qualified individuals from the available resource pool. This is a short term strategy that has run its course. In the future, we must focus on a more proactive approach to the resource pool requiring not only mining the current pool of America's youth, but also taking proactive steps to increase the number of qualified applicants. This paper will discuss the background of the AVF and provide recommendations for how DoD can shape the recruiting environment to overcome these challenges.

RECRUITING THE FUTURE FORCE: A PROACTIVE APPROACH

Our men and women in uniform are the best in the world. But the sophistication of our military is increasing every year so we will soon need even better qualified recruits. Unfortunately, the number of young Americans who have high school degrees, are in good physical shape, and are without criminal records is declining. To keep our country strong and safe, we need to ensure all young Americans get the right start in life – we need more investments in high quality early education.¹

—Henry “Hugh” Shelton
Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Department of Defense (DoD) plays a critical role in the national security strategy of the United States and the military’s success is predicated on recruiting highly qualified applicants to fulfill this vital mission. For almost forty years the all volunteer force (AVF) proved a remarkably successful approach to manning the most effective and dominant military in history. Today, however, the concept of a volunteer force is stressed as never before. Nearly a decade of protracted conflict, increasing deficiencies in our public education system and nearly epidemic obesity among our nation’s youth provide a new set of challenges to our recruiting force. The Pentagon reports that 75 percent of Americans aged 17-24 cannot meet the initial entry requirements for military service (Figure 1).² This number decreases further when we examine the target market (Figure 2).³

Currently recruiting efforts focus on a passive strategy; simply extracting the qualified individuals from the available resource pool. As with any critical resource this type of strategy requires an ever increasing commitment of effort to obtain your essential portion of an ever dwindling supply. This is depicted by the cost per high quality recruit over the last decade. Figure 3 shows the relationship between recruiting resources and high quality enlistment contracts.⁴

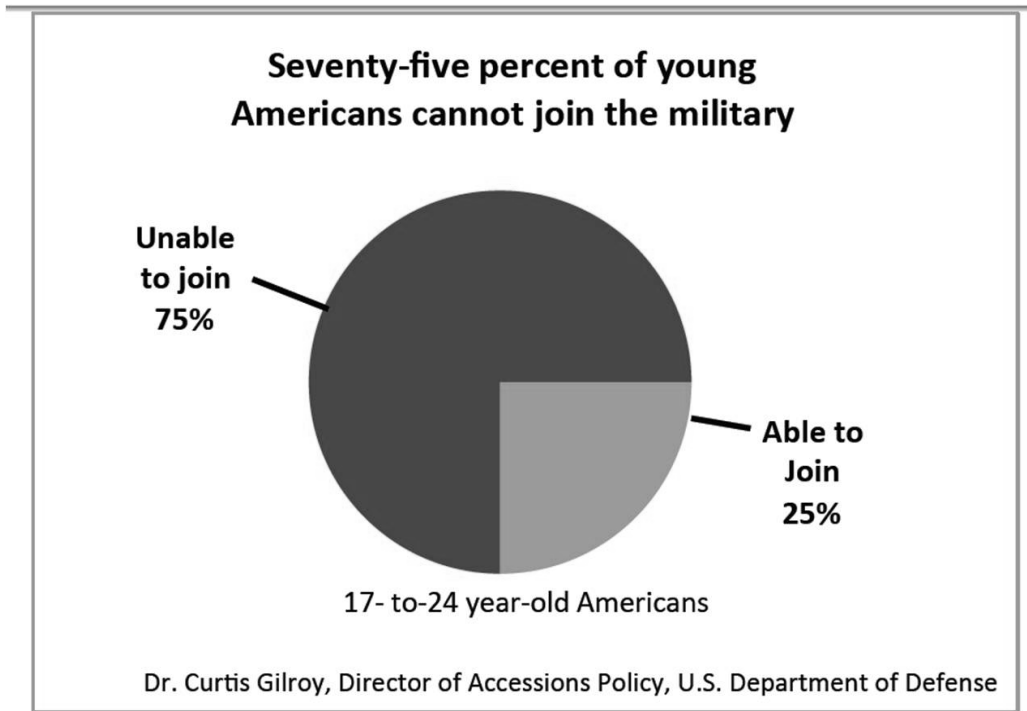


Figure 1. Percentage of 17-24 Year-Olds Eligible for Military Service

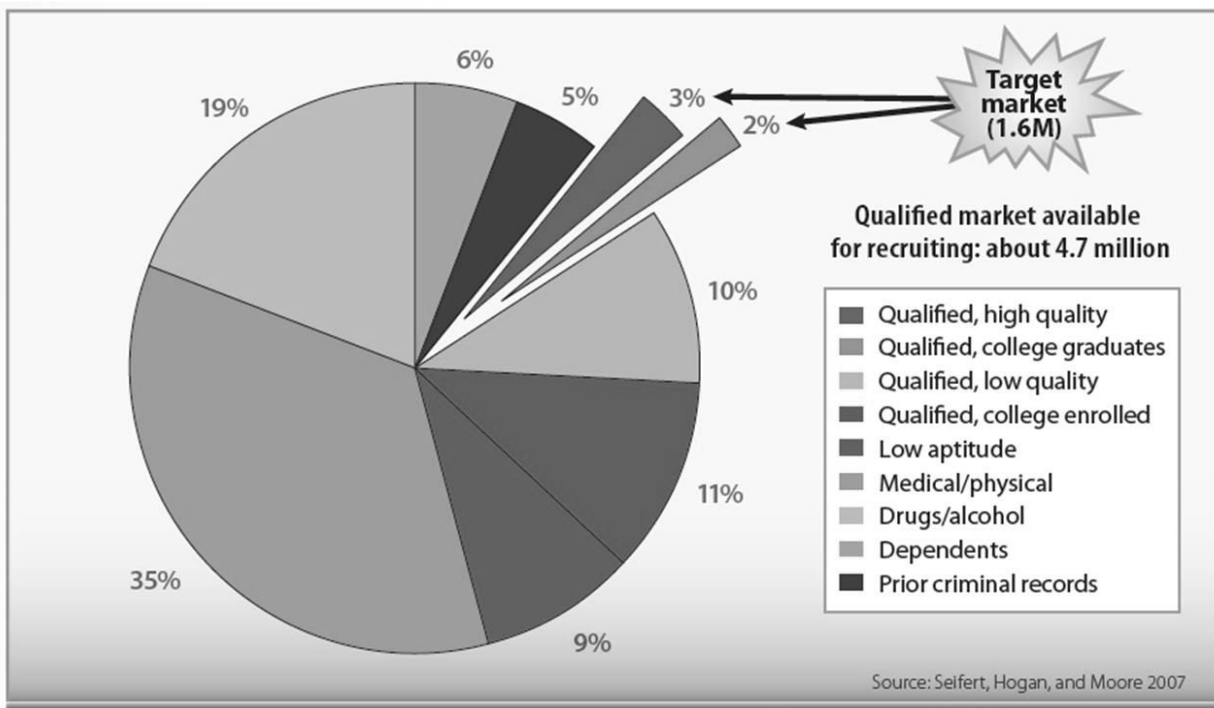


Figure 2. Qualified and Target Market for Military Enlistment

The data clearly indicates a direct relationship between resources applied to recruiting and the number of contracts achieved, but the per-contract cost is increasing at an alarming rate. It is not, however, a linear relationship and the number of contracts is not growing at a rate corresponding to the cost. Overall, DoD's cost per recruit increased 39 percent from FY 2000 to FY 2008 with the Army leading the way with a 53 percent increase over the same period.⁵ Currently it costs DoD \$18,632 to recruit one individual with the Army leading the way at \$24,323 per contract.⁶ Experts attributed this increase primarily to the more intense competition with the civilian sector for a dwindling number of qualified individuals combined with declining interest in military service due to protracted combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷ This is a short term unsustainable strategy that has run its course. In the future we must focus on

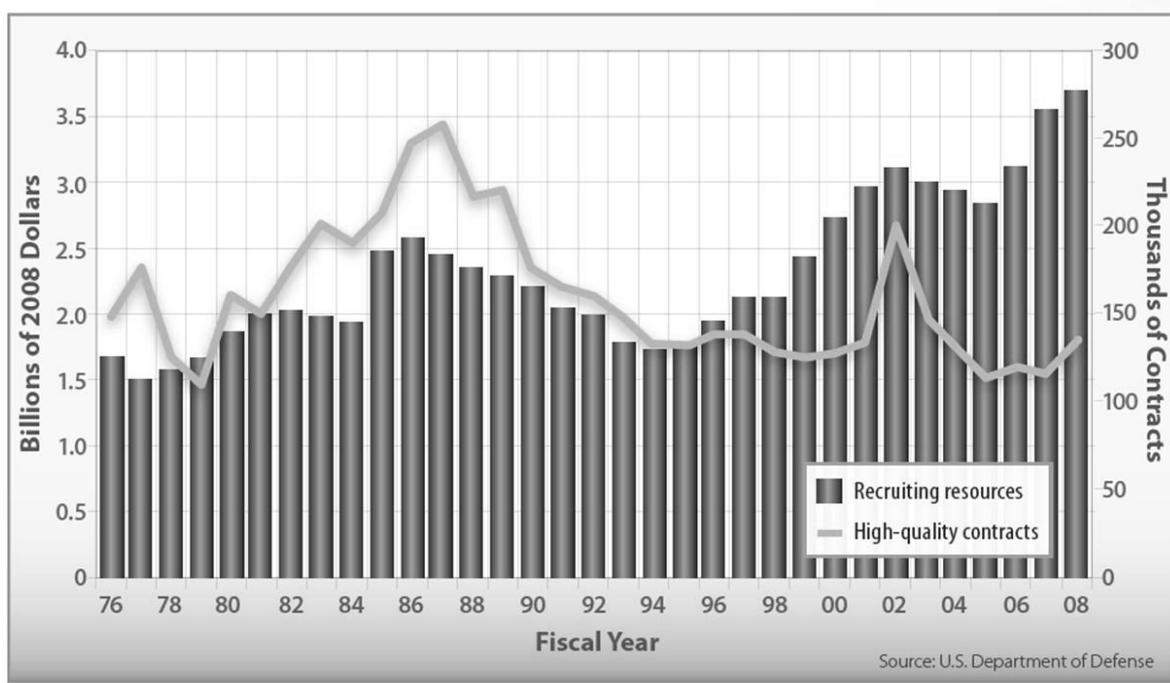


Figure 3. Cost Per High Quality Recruit

a more proactive approach to obtaining our most precious resource. This approach requires not only mining the current pool of America's youth, but also taking proactive steps to increase the number of qualified applicants. We must develop innovative programs to increase the education and fitness levels of the nation's youth in order to ensure a competent source of future recruits.

This is not simply a DoD problem; it is a national problem requiring a comprehensive solution to increase our ability to ensure the security of our nation. The United States government must institute policies in the near term to combat the major deficiencies existing within the preparedness of our number one resource, the incredible individuals who volunteer to serve during times of danger. We must develop effective strategies that continue to provide the United States with a powerful military option to complement the other dimensions of our power. We must also develop successful strategies and policies that produce a society more connected to our military and more qualified to serve. Finally, we must man a superior military force that is affordable to the nation and that can be maintained over an indefinite duration. Placing our primary focus on education and fitness in our public schools will yield the greatest short term and long term results that will allow us to maintain the quality and competence of our military forces now and in the future. Without these forces, the nation will be unable to protect its interests at home and abroad, and our very survival will be at risk. This is what makes finding a solution to these problems critical to our nation's future and why their resolution is an issue extending far beyond our military.

Where Do We Find These People?

One of the most critical aspects of U.S. national security remains our ability generate

the appropriate military forces to execute our national security strategy. The AVF becomes increasingly more difficult to sustain and the separation between those who defend freedom and the consumers of that freedom widens with every passing generation.⁸ There are many reasons for this increasing separation between those who serve and the general population. One of the major factors is that a primary driving force in determining military propensity is a familiarity with those who have served or are currently serving.⁹ Our own basing decisions and reinforcement of recruiting success in areas demonstrating high military propensity further exacerbate the gap by concentrating most of our military and recruiting efforts, and consequently, those who come in contact with the military into a very small geographic region encompassing five states: Texas, Washington, Georgia, Kentucky and North Carolina.¹⁰ This appears to be a sound policy based on a limited number of resources, but it also inadvertently shifts the propensity and therefore the burden to serve toward some of the least populace places in the country. It also may be a strategy doomed to fail if the current education and health trends remain unaltered.

Major educational, health and legal issues exist among our nation's youth. In most cases we can separate lack of military qualification into three broad categories: obesity, lack of education, and legal disqualification. In our most productive and propensed regions, including Southern states and states with the highest populations of operational military forces, disqualification figures exceed the national average in at least two of the three key indicators (Figure 4).¹¹ Obesity figures (Figure 5 and 6) prove more alarming and indicate that the regions of the country most propensed to enlist also lead the nation in obesity rates.¹² On a national level education obesity rates appear

States	States Worse Than National Average On:		
	Overweight or Obese Juveniles	Did Not Graduate High School	Legal Issues
Alabama	X	X	
Alaska	X	X	
Arizona		X	
Arkansas	X		X
California		X	
Colorado			X
Connecticut			
Delaware	X	X	X
District of Columbia	X	X	X
Florida	X	X	
Georgia	X	X	X
Hawaii			
Idaho			X
Illinois	X		
Indiana		X	X
Iowa			
Kansas			
Kentucky	X		
Louisiana	X	X	X
Maine			
Maryland			X
Massachusetts			X
Michigan			X
Minnesota			X
Mississippi	X	X	
Missouri			
Montana			
Nebraska			
Nevada	X	X	
New Hampshire			
New Jersey			
New Mexico	X	X	
New York	X	X	
North Carolina	X	X	
North Dakota			
Ohio	X		X
Oklahoma			
Oregon			
Pennsylvania			X
Rhode Island			X
South Carolina	X	X	
South Dakota			
Tennessee	X	X	
Texas	X	X	X
Utah			
Vermont			
Virginia			
Washington			X
West Virginia	X		
Wisconsin			
Wyoming			

Figure 4. Critical Factors of Military Ineligibility by State

Overweight and Obese Men and Women, 18 - 24 Years Old (Based on the CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Survey)		
Ranked by Highest to Lowest Percentage for 2006-2008	Percentage of 18 - 24 Yr Olds Overweight or Obese (Avg. 2006 - 2008)	Percentage of 18 - 24 Yr Olds Overweight or Obese (Avg. 1996 - 1998)
Kentucky	54.9	40.8
Alabama	51.2	38.6
Mississippi	50.1	38.8
South Dakota	48.4	35.5
West Virginia	48.1	36.2
Oklahoma	47.5	31.0
South Carolina	47.5	36.2
Texas	47.3	37.7
North Carolina	46.6	38.5
North Dakota	46.5	35.0
Hawaii	45.9	34.3
Kansas	45.8	35.8
Arkansas	45.7	37.2
New Jersey	45.1	33.3
Tennessee	44.8	32.6
Rhode Island	44.2	33.8
Georgia	43.9	34.4
Delaware	43.6	30.8
Missouri	43.3	39.5
Nebraska	43.2	29.9
New Hampshire	43.1	31.5
Washington	43.1	35.7
Montana	42.6	36.2
Illinois	42.4	32.8
Michigan	42.1	35.9
New York	41.9	33.3
Wyoming	41.7	26.7
New Mexico	41.6	35.2
Idaho	41.5	29.1
Virginia	41.4	32.0
Florida	41.3	31.2
Maine	41.2	38.4
Nevada	41.2	30.0
California	41.1	34.8
Minnesota	41.0	35.0
Louisiana	40.8	35.7
Connecticut	40.4	27.4
Ohio	40.4	33.3
Oregon	40.2	34.5
Iowa	39.9	35.0
Pennsylvania	39.6	33.6
Massachusetts	39.2	28.8
Vermont	39.2	31.9
Wisconsin	38.8	31.9
Indiana	38.6	34.6
Maryland	38.2	33.7
Colorado	36.8	28.4
Utah	33.1	27.2
United States	42.5	33.4

Figure 5. Obesity Data by State

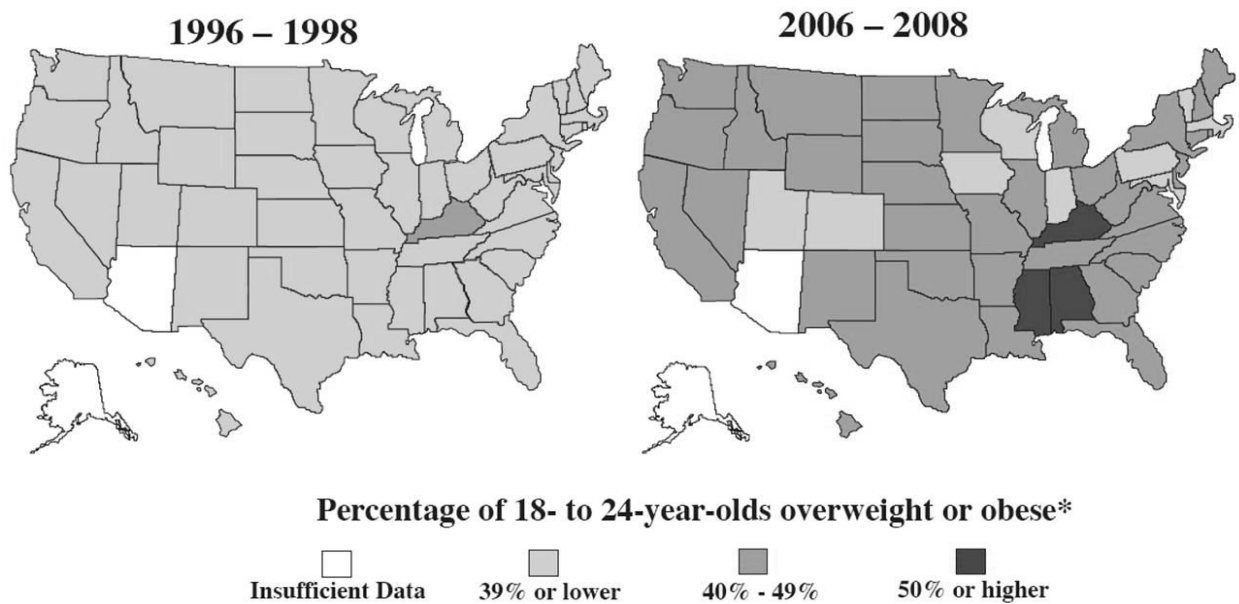


Figure 6. Obesity Data Map

abysmal and this severely hampers the ability of the services to man the force based on the current enlistment requirements. The inability to qualify mentally by obtaining a sufficient score on the military entrance exam and to meet military weight standards further eliminates many from military service. The increasing rate of educational deficiencies and obesity within our most lucrative markets presents a danger to the successful completion of one of our cornerstone missions; recruiting the force.

It seems ironic that the presence of the military in your community and a habitual association with the military are prime factors in the development of a propensity to serve. Yet this same presence fails to produce a population that meets the educational and physical requirements for service. This further strains our extrication strategy by diminishing the potential applicants within our most productive areas. In effect, we are

focusing our resources and efforts in areas that are most willing, but seemingly least qualified to serve. The recruiting force is a very finite resource primarily consisting of members of the operational force detailed to this assignment for 2 to 3 years. It is therefore constantly stressed by the needs of the operational force. In one way the services must rob Peter to pay Paul. As operational tempo and danger increase, recruiting becomes increasingly more difficult. In turn, more operational forces are applied to the recruiting mission. This deprives the operational force of critical manpower when it is most needed. This vicious cycle can only be curbed if the pool of quality applicants is dramatically increased. DoD adheres to the same personnel movement guidelines for recruiters as it does for all other missions. This makes wide scale movement of the recruiting force to adjust to market fluctuations problematic. Additionally, it takes time to obtain the infrastructure and facilities required for recruiting throughout the country. Perhaps most problematic would be effectively developing and cultivating the youth market as we enter new areas or refocus additional resources in existing markets.

Military Conscription and the Selective Service System

From a systems perspective, the most efficient way the government can ensure that it obtains the best and brightest for its military is through compulsory military service, or the draft. Clearly the draft serves the military's needs most effectively simply based on the expansion of the potential talent pool. In essence, the government chooses them and has little need for targeted advertising or the art of persuasion. Since it has been nearly forty years since the U.S. instituted the AVF, most Americans probably retain few memories of the draft. Most, if not all, of the potential draft aged population had not been born yet when the military draft ended. Today's military age

youth's have little knowledge about the draft besides the selective service registration requirement for 18 year old males. Most look upon military service as a strictly volunteer endeavor. History, however, teaches us that conscription has been a way of life for Americans in nearly every conflict in our history. In fact, for the first time in our history, our nation is engaged in a protracted worldwide conflict that policy makers deemed of vital national interest without the benefit of the draft. In this critical period of our nation's history, is a military draft the answer?

From the Civil War until the period prior to WWII, the military relied on conscription to fill its ranks in times of war. In 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with the strong encouragement of Army Chief of Staff George Marshall, instituted the first peacetime draft in response to the threats posed by Germany and Japan.¹³ The peacetime draft continued throughout much of the Cold War ending at the conclusion of the Vietnam War.

Throughout its history the draft never achieved great popularity as it always seemed paradoxical to the tenets of our free society. It was, however, seen as a necessary evil during times of crisis and war, and most citizens accepted it as one of the prices of freedom. Even without the presence of patriotic zeal, the government consistently utilized this method to meet the needs of the military. Although compulsory military service appears inconsistent with our way of life, U.S. law clearly supports the practice. The Supreme Court of the United States upheld the government's power to compel military service in 1918.¹⁴ Most federal rulings provided the government wide latitude to implement the constitutional powers identified in Articles I and VIII of the U.S.

Constitution. Even the most adamant critics of conscription find it unlikely that the current court or any future court would provide contrary rulings.

The great majority of Americans generally support a draft for patriotic reasons when the war is thought just, and the threat to our national survival or well being imminent. As the crisis fades, the justness of the war becomes questionable or the threat minimizes, that support wanes. Recent polls on reinstatement of the draft reflect these attitudes. Immediately after the attacks of September 11, 2001, 76 percent of Americans supported a new draft if the armed forces required additional manpower. That number decreased to 27 percent less than four years later.¹⁵

Although Congress' ability to reinstitute the draft appears concrete, the political capital required to take such action cannot be underestimated. The U.S. society always maintained an uncomfortable relationship with mandatory military service. Opposition to the draft emerged in every instance since its inception. The anti-war and anti-draft demonstrations in the 1960's actually paled in severity to those conducted during the civil war in response to the draft. The use of Army artillery and U.S. warships to quell the New York City draft riots in July 1863 serve as our first response to the fairness and justice of a draft. Although it remains impossible to predict the social response to renewed conscription, it seems implausible that a limited draft would have such a vitriol reaction in today's society. One of the major reasons is that the current selective service apparatus removed most of the perceived injustices in system.¹⁶ The use of a lottery system to determine eligibility, fewer deferment categories, limitations on student deferments that favored the more affluent, and selective service boards more

representative of their communities help provide a degree of fairness lacking in the previous rendition.¹⁷

Representative Charles Rangel (D) of New York stands out as the major proponent for restoring the draft. Whether a political ploy or legitimate national security issue, most of the congressman's arguments lack factual support and the resolutions continue to be soundly defeated within the legislative body.¹⁸ Rangel's most cogent argument states that if all segments of society endured the same risk of death in a conflict then government would apply a higher standard to the commitment of military force.¹⁹

Most politicians recognize that renewal of a military draft is probably politically untenable at this time. This remains true even as the military struggles under the strain of nearly a decade of continuous conflict. Additionally, military leaders continually balk at the prospect of reinstituting the draft believing that is not how best to maintain a highly skilled and motivated force.²⁰ Under these circumstances how can we improve the all volunteer system and make it more responsive to the national security needs of the nation and re-engage the majority of society with their military? A history lesson of the AVF and examination of societal trends reveals some potential solutions.

Since the start of the Iraq war several members of the U.S. Congress proposed legislation to reinstate the draft. This would overhaul nearly four decades of the AVF created in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. It appears more logical to modify the current system to increase the number of qualified applicants. Congress can achieve this result by modifying existing statutes and increasing incentives for schools and individuals to participate in a military preparedness program.

The All-Volunteer Force

In 1973 the United States embarked on an experimental idea of an all volunteer force with a complementary selective service system that would serve the nation in times of emergency as recommended by the Gates Commission.²¹ The AVF gained instant popularity with draft aged members of the society, but was an expensive and risky proposition initially opposed by many members of Congress and the military itself.²² A non-conscript force would significantly raise the personnel costs of maintaining a large standing army. Competition with the civilian job market demanded a substantial increase in initial entry pay.²³ This increase in personnel spending placed other priorities such as weapons programs and modernization at risk as long as military budgets in peacetime remained at historically low levels.²⁴

A selective service registration system remained in place from 1973-1975 to counter potential contingencies or national emergencies that the AVF failed to fulfill.²⁵ President Carter reinstated the registration requirement in 1980 as the result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and it remains intact today for all male U.S. citizens and aliens living in the United States ages 18-25 years old.²⁶ The government created a variety of embedding mechanisms designed to ensure compliance with the registration requirement. The maximum penalty for failing to register stands at a \$250,000 fine and five years in prison. Additionally, failure to register eliminates eligibility for federal jobs and jobs training, student financial aid and citizenship.²⁷

The volunteer military proved to be a surprising success. Remarkably, the armed forces recruited nearly 400,000 non prior service accessions in the first year of the program. This is an extraordinary figure considering the state of the force at the time and that our current force struggles to fill less than half that number.²⁸ Today, a number

of factors exert influence over our ability to man an effective military force. Protracted conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, increased optempo amongst each service, competition from the civilian sector, and the on-going health and education crisis apply stress to the already difficult task of convincing our nation's young men and women to become the defenders of freedom. The make-up of our society provides the most critical insight into our future ability to maintain adequate forces to execute our defense strategy.

Understanding how DoD calculates the qualifications of potential applicants offers insight into how the nation might produce a more capable population base to fill the nation's requirements. The remainder of this paper concentrates on reversing two of the most prevalent trends facing America's youth; the failure of our society to produce enough mentally qualified individuals to support the all AVF and the high rates of obesity that exists within our borders. We will look at some potential solutions, all of which require a comprehensive government approach to develop and implement.

Disturbing Trends for America's Youth

The latest Department of Defense (DoD) survey of America's youth identified the primary reasons for disqualification for military service as follows: medical/physical problems (35 percent), illegal drug use (18 percent), Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) category V (9 percent), too many dependents under age 18 (6 percent) and criminal record (5 percent).²⁹ Very few authorities to solve these societal issues reside within the military, but DoD must voice concerns at the highest levels to help highlight how these problems affect their critical ability to protect our national interests.

Application of DoD resources, influence and lobbying acumen provides potential opportunities to change the dynamic to allow us to produce a better educated and healthier youth population.

In 1948 Congress mandated that the DoD develop a screening test utilized by all services.³⁰ Thus the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), the precursor to the current Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) was born.³¹ In 1960 they refined the AFQT and created the ASVAB. The current ASVAB consists of a multiple-aptitude battery testing knowledge in eight areas: general science, mathematics, word knowledge, paragraph comprehension, electronics information, auto and shop information and mechanical comprehension.³² The military reports the results in three ways. First, they provide an individual aptitude for each of the eight sub-categories. Next, they offer a career exploration composite for use in applying these aptitudes toward a civilian career. Finally, they supply the most important score, the AFQT.³³ The AFQT is only one component of the ASVAB, but it is the primary driving factor in overall qualification. AFQT scores are reported from 1-99 and express how well the applicant performed in comparison with an initial test group called the norm.³⁴ The latest normative data consists of approximately 12,000 applicants completing the exam in 1997.³⁵

The military began administering the ASVAB in high schools throughout the country in 1968.³⁶ Due to the existence of the military draft the ASVAB remained unused as a recruiting or qualification tool until 1976.³⁷ Today, the ASVAB serves as the world's most widely used aptitude battery and is a nationally recognized, normed aptitude battery taken by more than 40 million individuals since its inception.³⁸ With various revisions, the ASVAB stands as the single greatest factor in determining an applicant's qualification for military service in every branch of the military including the Coast Guard.

It also provides a premier career exploration program supporting all educational and career paths with no required military obligation.³⁹ In order to entice school participation in the ASVAB, the U.S. Military Entrance and Processing Command (USMEPCOM) combines the ASVAB with a comprehensive Career Exploration Program (CEP) in a high school environment. In addition to utilizing the ASVAB to identify military aptitude, USMEPCOM designed the CEP as a tool to help students develop an understanding of the civilian workforce and increase decision making processes that assist them throughout their lives.⁴⁰ They developed all the materials used to assist schools in meeting the National Standards for School Counseling Programs.⁴¹ However, the major purpose of the test remains to provide lists of pre-qualified recruiting leads to the military services and USMEPCOM provides this public service free to schools throughout the nation.⁴² In this area, USMEPCOM fails to keep pace with the increasing requirement for quality leads. Although the recruiting missions increased from 2003 to 2008 the number of leads USMEPCOM provided actually decreased during that same period (Figure 7).⁴³ Although USMEPCOM accomplished a greater degree of their internal goal, that goal was not related to the personnel procurement mission. If it did, we would have expected a corresponding increase in their internal goal with the increase in the recruiting missions of the services.

Throughout its inception the high school administered ASVAB existed as a partnership between the Department of Education (DoE) and DoD.⁴⁴ This partnership continues today as DoD offers the test free of charge to all of the 22,642 public high schools within the United States.⁴⁵ As a result, approximately 54 percent of the total

number of schools offer ASVAB testing either on a voluntary or mandatory basis (Figure 8).⁴⁶

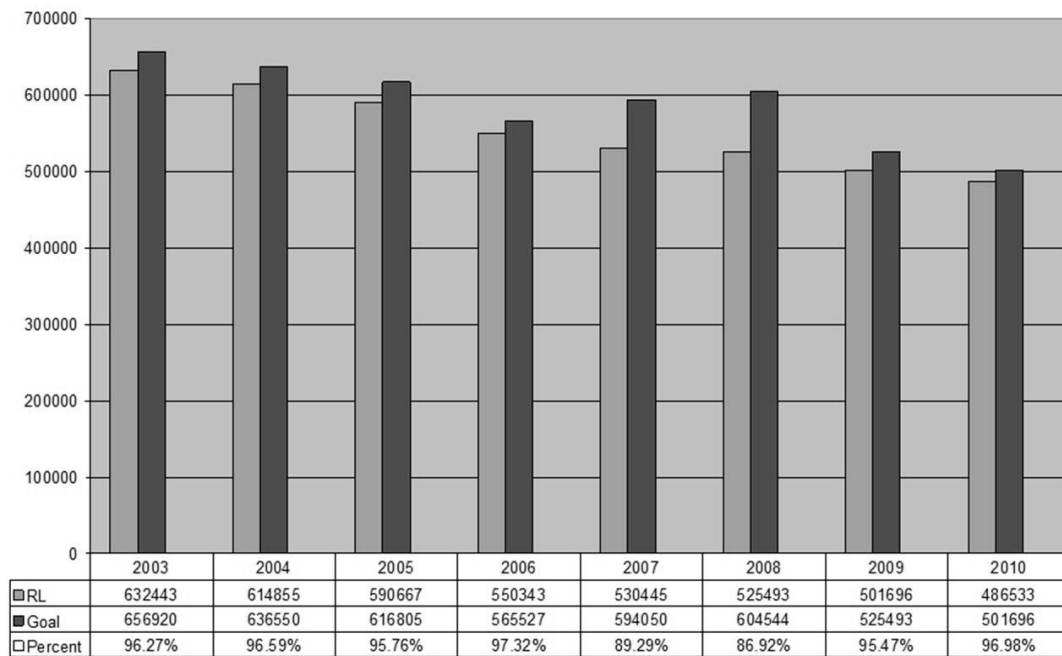


Figure 7. Leads Provided to Recruiters Thru ASVAB Testing

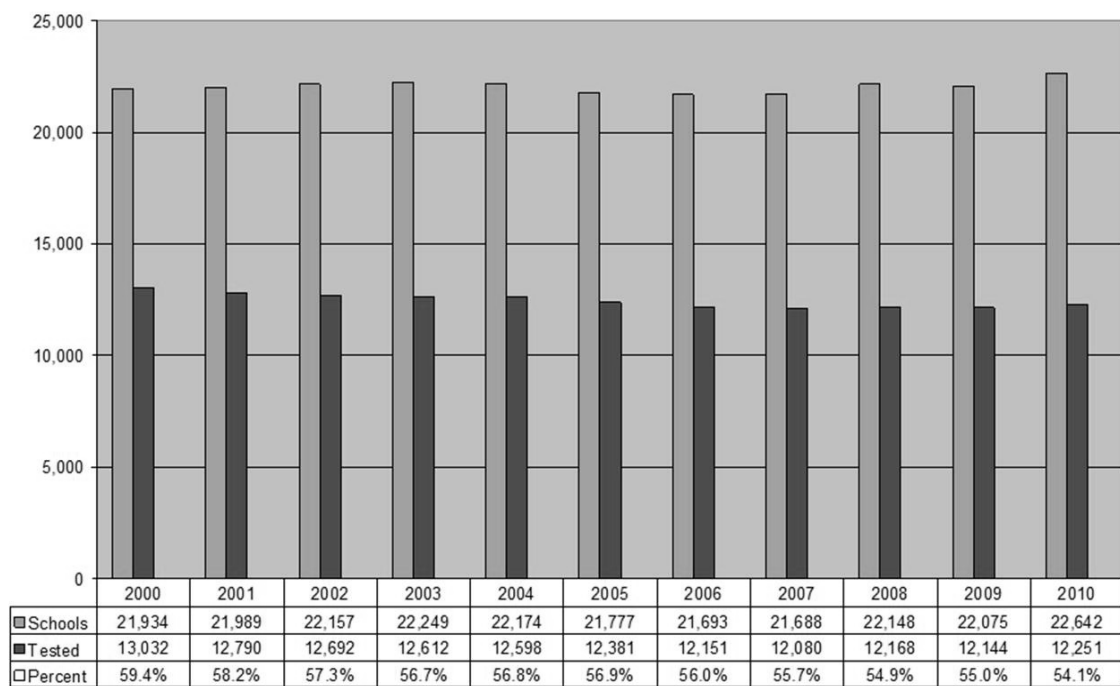


Figure 8. Percentage of Schools with at Least Some ASVAB Participation

This provided testing for more than 650,000 high school students at no cost to local schools.⁴⁷ This, however, equates to only 6.1 percent of the United States' total high school population (Figure 9).⁴⁸ USMEPCOM does not achieve the necessary market penetration in our high schools which creates more stress on the recruiting force.

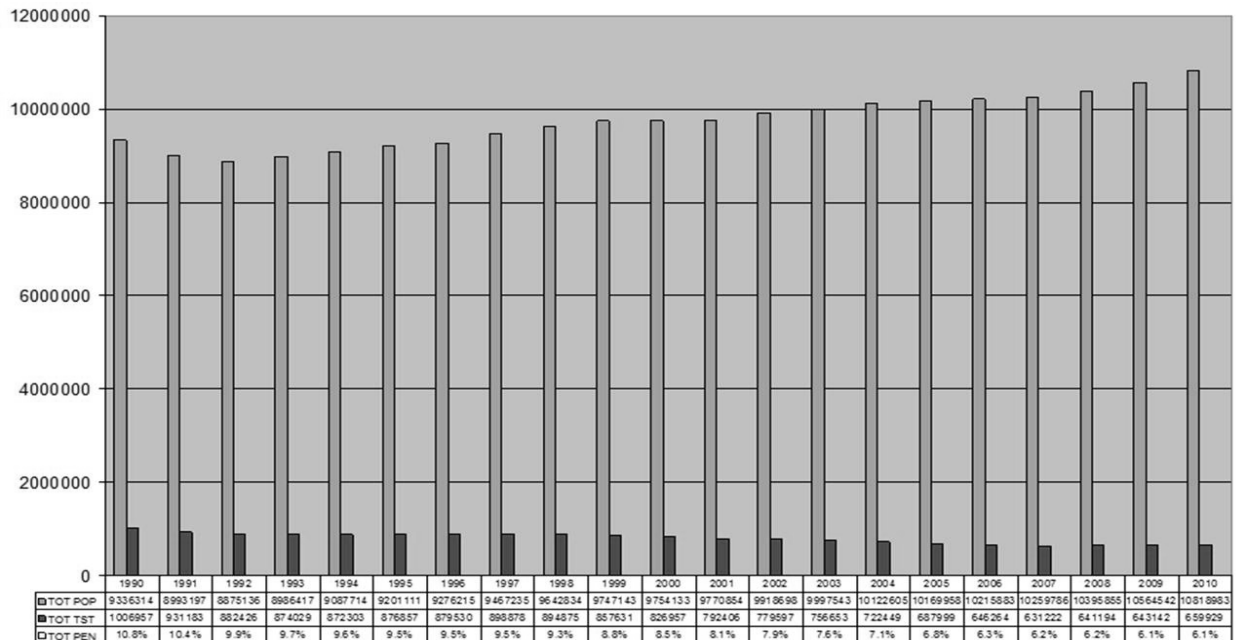


Figure 9. Percentage of High School Students Taking ASVAB

This serves as yet another indication of how the general population continues to be separated from its military. This separation becomes more pronounced when you consider that it likely includes the 162,000 non prior service accessions that took the ASVAB as part of their enlistment process.⁴⁹ Additionally, more than 10 percent of the test population consists of sophomores whose test scores would be invalidated prior to their graduation (Figure 10)⁵⁰. Furthermore, the overall numbers include a large segment of the test population, more than 60 percent, that tested as juniors and were

ineligible for most enlistments (Figure 11).⁵¹ The data represents a steady decline over the last decade which must be reversed in order to sustain the all volunteer force.

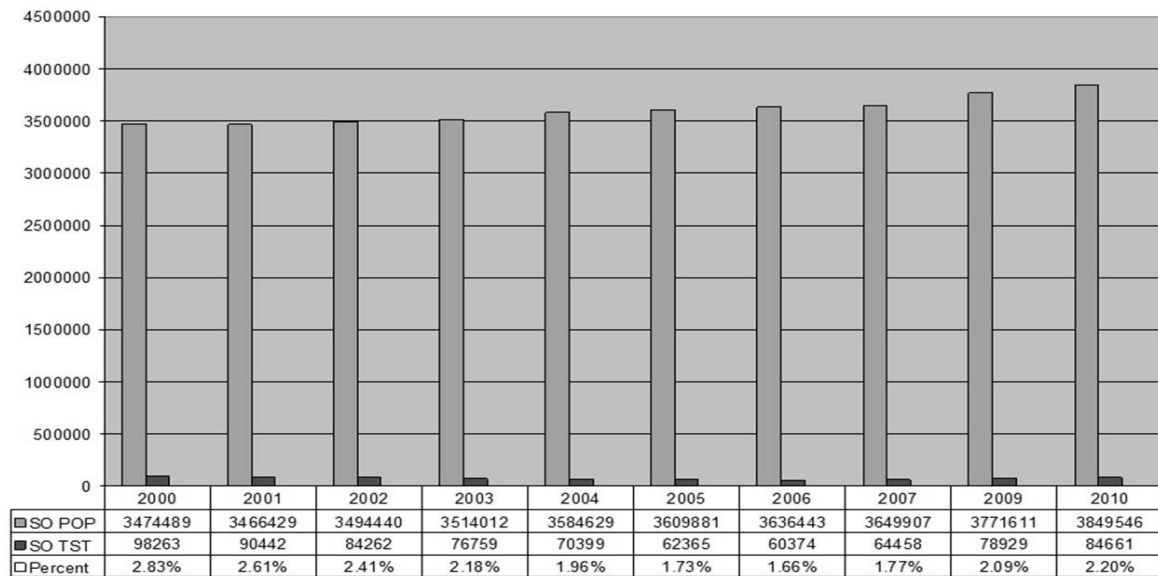


Figure 10. Number of Sophomores Conducting ASVAB

Testing

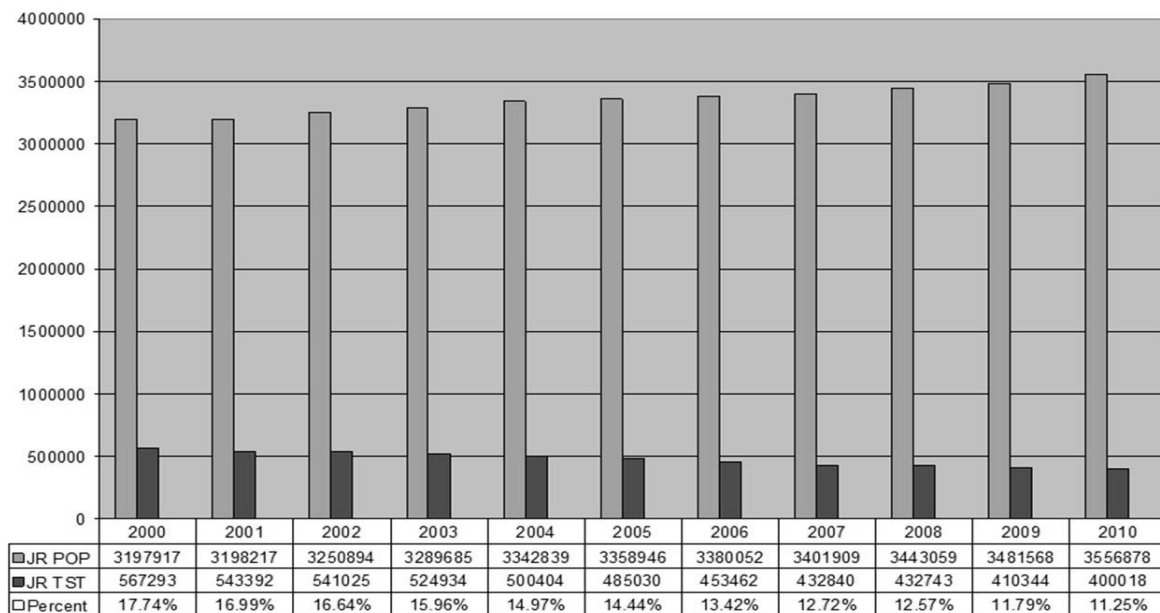


Figure 11. Number of Juniors Conducting ASVAB Testing

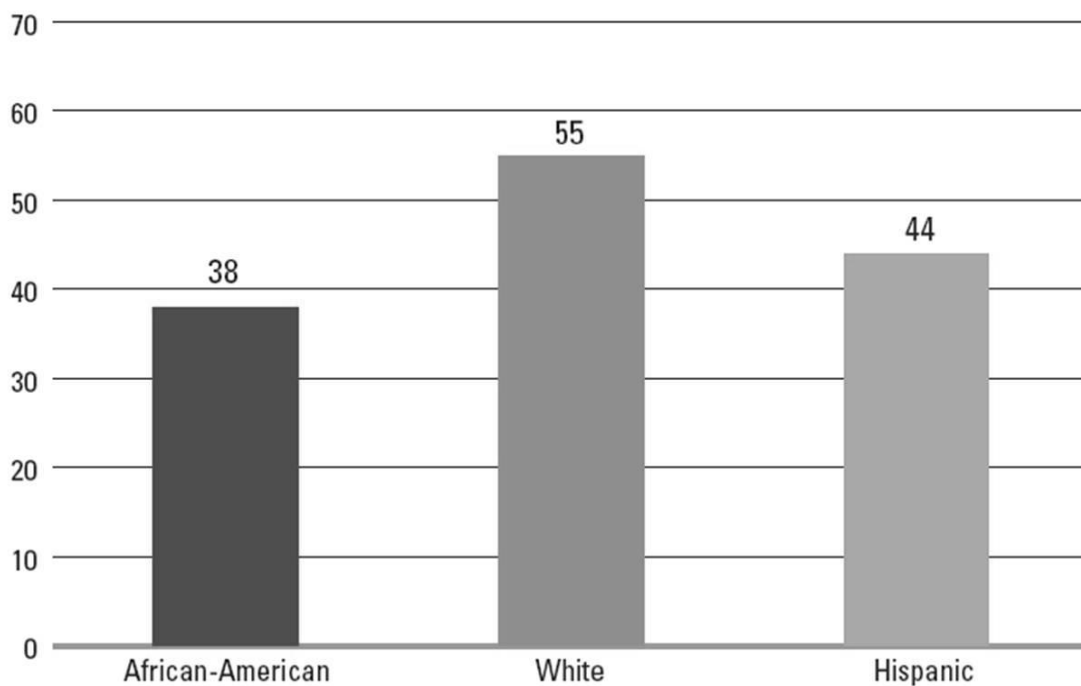
In December 2010, the Education Trust published a survey indicating that nearly 23 percent of a self selected sample of today's youth could not pass the ASVAB.⁵² In this case passing was defined as scoring a 31 on the AFQT. This again is defined as scoring equal or better to 31 percent of the control (norm) group in 1997

Although the actual figures for the normal percentage failing are not published, recruiting and educational officials immediately sounded an alarm. According to U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, "Too many of our high school students are not graduating ready to begin college or a career – and many are not eligible to serve in our armed forces. I am deeply troubled by the national security burden created by America's underperforming education system."⁵³ Figure 12 indicates the AFQT categories and their corresponding percentiles.⁵⁴

AFQT Category	Percentile Score Range
I	93-99
II	65-92
IIIA	50-64
IIIB	31-49
IV	10-30
V	1-9

Figure 12. AFQT Categories and Corresponding Percentile Scores

The trend among minority test takers was more pronounced. The AFQT mean test scores showed a marked disparity among African-American and Hispanic youth compared to their white counterparts (Figure 13).⁵⁵ The failure rate among high school graduates was 16 percent among white youth, increasing to 29 percent and 39 percent respectively among Hispanic and African American sectors of the population.⁵⁶ Although the study does not identify any of the causal relationships between failure and socio-economic factors potentially involved, it does give a somewhat startling look at the relationship between race/ethnicity and ASVAB performance.



Source: Education Trust analysis of U.S. Army ASVAB data.

Figure 13. Mean AFQT Score by Race/Ethnicity

Racial and ethnic disparity on a standardized test is nothing new and these results reflect those of other standardized tests such as the SAT or ACT.⁵⁷ From a military perspective, these results cause more concern than in the case of college

entrance exams due to their relationship to national defense. This type of analysis assumes greater relevancy as future demographic shifts impact the make-up of our military. Future recruiting efforts may rely more heavily on different segments of our society and these issues and disparities must be addressed to ensure a reliable source of potential recruits in the coming decades. Additionally, it goes beyond simple eligibility to serve as AFQT scores directly affect career field choices, bonus eligibility and career progression.⁵⁸ Analysis of military enlistees' AFQT scores indicate some disparity (Figure 14).⁵⁹ If we cannot reverse these trends, diversity goals in the military become increasingly more difficult to obtain and recruiting efforts may be hampered in certain regions and urban markets.

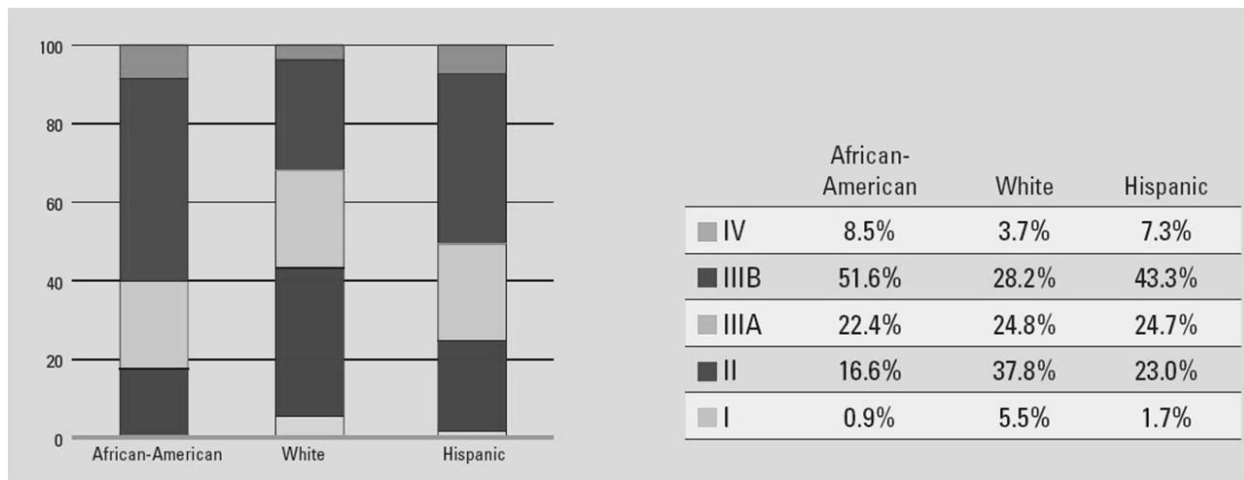


Figure 14. AFQT Performance by Category Based on Race/Ethnicity

Again much of the disquieting data indicates that our most vital markets are at more risk. AFQT failure rates are at or above average in four of the five states where we have stationed the preponderance of our forces and in areas that remain the most propensed to enlist (Figure 15).⁶⁰

Strategies for the Future

A strategy potentially capable of producing beneficial results is one designed to increase ASVAB participation and performance on a national level. On a local level the Army encourages recruiters to monitor ASVAB testing and to persuade schools within their area to provide the test for its students on a voluntary or mandatory basis.⁶¹ Both forms of testing provide a significant pool of potential applicants who have already been pre-screened for at least mental qualifications. However, school programs often consist of numerous structural problems with little or no incentive to achieve exemplary results.

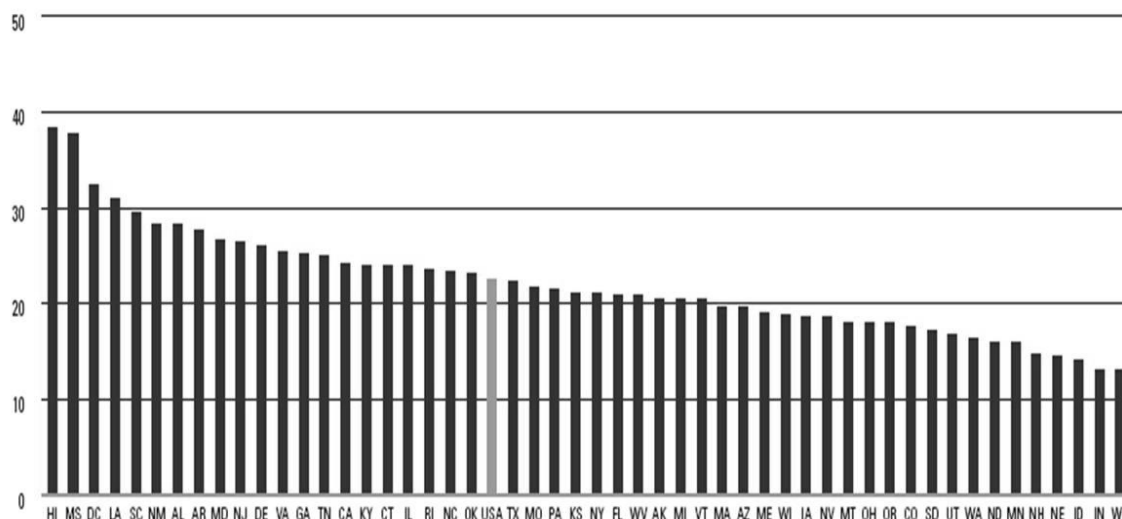


Figure 15. Percentage of Applicants with Failing AFQT Scores by State

They are normally conducted by schools as an alternative to some other distasteful activity and participation is often seen as the lesser of two evils.⁶² This skews the data as many students are simply going through the drill.⁶³

The presence of counter-recruiting efforts within many of our secondary and post secondary schools also diminishes the number of schools conducting ASVAB testing. Most counter recruiting efforts focus on provisions of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Act requiring high schools to provide contact and other information to the military for all of their students who do not opt out. Counter-recruitment campaigns in many of the most populous and liberal areas of the country, where their contribution to military service is disproportionately small compared to their overall percentage of the population, continually attempt to exert pressure on schools to disobey the law in protest, to be active about informing students of their ability to opt out, and/or to allow counter-recruiters equal access to campuses to directly counter military recruiting efforts. These political campaigns have had some success, particularly in the Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle areas. Many also provide opt-out forms and provide information on how to avoid military recruiters or methods for reneging on a military enlistment contract via the internet or other distribution sources.⁶⁴

As a result of these efforts, USMEPCOM offered multiple options to students taking the exam, two of which offered no information of test results to military recruiters (Figure 16).⁶⁵ This eliminated more than 79,000 potential military applicants from the resource pool; thus providing a service to the department of education and local schools with no discernable benefit to the military (Figure 17).⁶⁶

Release Option	Results to Recruiting Services
Option 1	7 DAYS AFTER TEST SCORES ARE MAILED.
Option 2	60 days after test scores are mailed. No contact prior to that time
Option 3	90 days after test scores are mailed. No contact prior to that time
Option 4	120 days after test scores are mailed. No contact prior to that time
Option 5	End of school year. No contact prior to that time
Option 6	7 days after test scores are mailed. No telephone solicitations by recruiters
Option 7	Not valid for enlistment purposes. Results not released to Recruiting Services
Option 8	Not released to Recruiting Services

Figure 16. Release Options for ASVAB Test Results

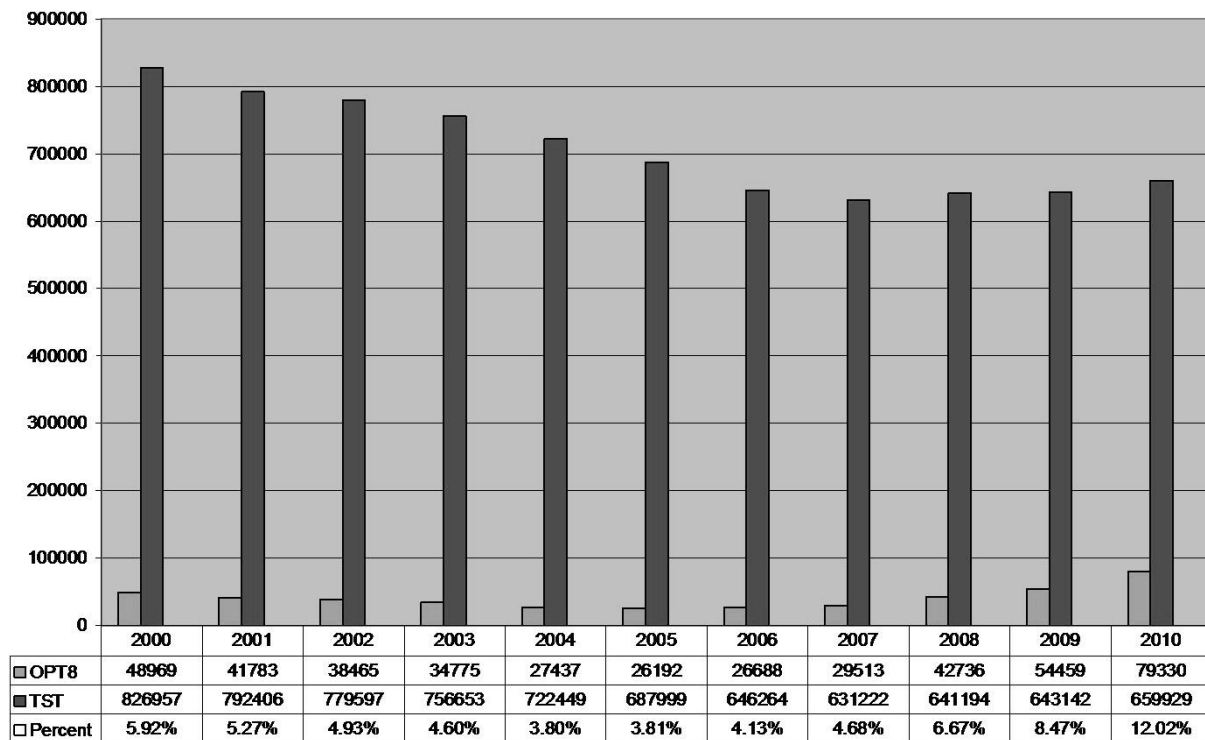


Figure 17. Option 8 ASVAB Testers

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires public secondary schools to allow military recruiters the same access to students as any private organization or institute of higher education and to provide contact information for every student as a condition for receipt of federal funds.⁶⁷ Ostensibly this means that if Harvard University has access to that student, so does a recruiter. If schools don't provide that access then they can potentially lose federal funding. The NCLB provides an opt-out option that allows parents or students to deny other entities access to this personal information. It applies to all information sharing, but in many instances schools apply it only to military recruiters.⁶⁸

A better approach is a nationwide strategy to insist that public schools conduct mandatory ASVAB testing and eliminate the opt-out option. The Federal District Court

threw out the National Education Association backed lawsuit in 2005 that claimed that compliance with NCLB as a condition of federal funding constituted an unfunded federal mandate. The court denied the plaintiff's claim concluding that the requirements set forth in the legislation are voluntary based on a condition of federal funds and therefore do not represent a federal directive. The ruling was upheld by the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case.⁶⁹

Existing case law suggests that the courts would allow mandatory testing as a function of improving military readiness. The Supreme Court already upheld the government's right to compel military service and the act of mandatory testing seems to meet a lower threshold of social disruption. The Supreme Court denied recent challenges to Congress' authority to deny federal funding to universities restricting access to their campuses to military recruiters. In a unanimous decision the Court ruled the Solomon Act constitutional and further stated that Congress, through the "raise and support Armies" clause, could even directly force schools to allow recruiting without threatening the withholding of funds, if they so desired, and that, as a result, no question of unconstitutional conditions arises.⁷⁰ It is logical that the same would hold for mandatory testing as a basis for delivery of federal funding.

Increasing the partnership between DoD and DoE and slightly modifying the NCLB act could prove beneficial to our military and our schools. Provisions of NCLB offer common ground for both DoD and the DoE as well as public schools wishing to qualify for federal funds for education by complying with NCLB. One of the most costly requirements for schools is the assessment process. In accordance with NCLB there is no standard for certification. States submit their assessment plans and they are graded

on progress annually toward specific academic goals.⁷¹ Most states require assessment testing as part of this process. The GAO estimates the total annual cost of testing at approximately \$5.3 billion. Many school systems throughout the country lack the funds to execute the testing and assessment requirements, but are very dependent on federal funding.⁷² For example, the State Education Department of New York estimated a funding shortfall of \$11.5-21 million in FY 2010-11.⁷³ If the federal government mandated and funded a standardized testing process this would alleviate one of the key “unfunded requirements” of NCLB and provide a significant cost savings to local school systems. Additionally, the added opportunity costs of assessment testing negatively impacts ASVAB testing in schools. Many schools have dropped ASVAB testing due the time requirements of other testing regimens.⁷⁴ If the legislation identified the ASVAB as the standardized certification test then DoD assumes responsibility for its development, implementation and administration at no cost to DoE or local schools.

It would be difficult to ascertain what the actual cost to DoD would be for this program, but it is logical to assume that it would be considerably less and add only marginally to the cost of their existing testing program. The development and implementation as well as proctor support remain relatively fixed costs regardless of the size of the tested population. Other activities like civilian proctor support and any enhancements to the exam would have to be absorbed, but the cost is likely negligible compared to the potential gain.

This activity also provides DoD with the opportunity to interact with a greater population of students, while at the same time providing incentives for schools to

increase ASVAB scores as they are directly tied to institutional performance standards. This increases the ties between the military and its populace, while at the same time increasing the availability of qualified personnel. If we objectively set the standard at 31 AFQT on the ASVAB we effectively create an incentive for our schools to produce a larger pool of well qualified individuals for military as well as civilian service.⁷⁵

In essence, everyone gets what they want. The military gets a bigger bang for its buck allowing greater access to a majority of students and increasing the visibility and contact of the nation with its military. This access to the high school population remains critical to DoD efforts to man the force as propensity for military service drops dramatically for most groups after the age of 18.⁷⁶ It maintains the AVF, but also provides valuable information to the selective service system for use in times of national emergency. Local school districts receive a world renowned aptitude and career exploration tool as well as a metric for compliance with federal standards at no cost. This allows schools the ability to funnel these savings into other critical programs. This also eliminates the need for multiple testing mechanisms and disciplines and adds additional cost and time savings to resource starved educators.

Inclusion of ASVAB testing as part of the selective service system would provide individual incentive for successful completion. Congress could prescribe similar requirements to ASVAB testing and scores as those currently used for registration itself. A student's failure to comply with these requirements would carry legal and financial ramifications to include possible fines or incarceration. The government could also deny federal financial aid or other benefits if the test is not taken or desired results are

not achieved. Additionally, Congress could apply the selective service registration and ASVAB testing requirements to both genders.

Another option is to offer financial incentives to schools that conduct the test and produce improved results.⁷⁷ Again this would be tied to NCLB funding with DoD making up the difference between congressional appropriations for DoE and NCLB compliance in the form of enticement based on ASVAB qualification scores. Schools performing better and producing more qualified military applicants would receive greater financial rewards.

These financial incentives should be initially targeted toward school systems located in communities near military installations to take advantage of existing military-community ties and to assist in targeting more diverse markets. This effort will produce the most immediate effects in our most lucrative markets and help to highlight the effectiveness of the program for more wide-spread application.

Additionally, as the race and ethnicity data shows, DoD and DoE must focus efforts on financially distressed schools and those with high minority populations. Without this emphasis many of these populations could remain unable to avail themselves of the opportunity for military service. We will have to overcome the inevitable criticism that we are targeting minorities and the poor, and must have a powerful strategic communications message available that highlights the data which refutes that assertion. Part of the message must be that the current educational climate is not providing this segment of our youth with an opportunity to serve. Without some new effort to reverse the trends identified, we will close the door on the military for a vast number of these populations.

None of this, however, can be achieved at the local level. It requires a partnership between the Department of Defense, Department of Education and Congress to make mandatory ASVAB testing a reality. If they develop proper reinforcing and embedding mechanisms scores should improve nationwide and increase the available population for military service.

A Test by any Other Name

Another aspect of cultural change must be addressed by renaming the exam. The ASVAB is a well respected exam and is rated highly among educational and psychological testing agencies to include the American Educational Research Association and the American Psychological Association.⁷⁸ It is even a fairly accurate predictor of results on other standardized tests.⁷⁹ The problem with many schools and other organizations lies in the name. Simply changing the name may yield better acceptance of the program and make it a more acceptable tool for certification. USMEPCOM already provides the exam in the nation's high schools as part of a more comprehensive tool for career choice and development and DoD and DoE could enhance this perception through a successful strategic communication plan.

Obesity: The New Health Epidemic

Every month hundreds of otherwise excellent candidates for military service are turned away by their recruiters because of weight problems. Since 1995, the proportion of recruits who failed their physical exams because they were overweight has risen by nearly 70 percent. We need to reverse this trend, and an excellent place to start is by improving the quality of food served in our schools.⁸⁰

—General John M. Shalikashvili
Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

This is not the first time that military leaders sounded the alarm about the physical fitness and nutrition of America's youth. Lessons learned from World War II

indicated that 40 percent of those rejected for military service were as a result of conditions directly related to poor nutrition.⁸¹ General Lewis Hershey, the director of the Selective Service, viewed this as a strategic issue for the nation and was one of the first senior military leaders to draw the corollary between the health of our youth and our military preparedness. As the Cold War dawned and we began maintaining a large peacetime standing Army this connectivity became increasingly important. So much so, that General Hershey testified in support of the National School Lunch Program established in 1946 as a way to ensure the military could maintain a high level of readiness in the future.⁸²

According to Army Accession's Command (AAC) over 27 percent of the military age population are too heavy to join the military.⁸³ USMEPCOM reported that more than 140,000 individuals failed their military entrance physicals from 1995-2008 based solely on their inability to meet the military's weight standards.⁸⁴ Comparison with the data encountered in WWII allows for an interesting generational comparison. General Hershey's biggest problems stemmed from a lack of available nutrition, while today's youth suffer from a seemingly unlimited supply of food, albeit not necessarily consumed in a healthy or nutritional manner. This enormous source of potential manpower dwarfs the shortfalls in recruiting during that period and represents an untapped resource that the military may not be able to ignore in the future. The latest CDC figures indicate just how prevalent the obesity epidemic has become and the scope of the problem faced by today's military recruiters (Figure 5 and 6).⁸⁵ Throughout the nation our youth population struggles with a nearly chronic level of obesity. As previously discussed, one

of the reasons that this trend is most alarming is the fact that our own basing strategy concentrates the majority of our units in five states.

Since enlistment propensity is often tied to some familial or proximal connection to the military these geographic regions generally account for a proportionally higher number of enlistees than other more populous area. The data indicates that the percentage of youth obesity exceeds the national average in four of the five states that hold the preponderance of our forces. It also shows that the most well represented regions for recruiting success also suffer from some of the highest obesity rates. These two facts severely degrade our ability to effectively man the force. In fact, only two states, Colorado and Utah, from the mountain west region, one of our most lucrative recruiting markets, have an obesity rate of less than 40 percent.

The obesity trend shows no signs of abating in the near future without a cultural change among our nation's youth. Comparison of the CDC data for 1996-1998 to the data taken only a decade later, shows a dramatic shift toward an unhealthier and less fit resource pool available to defend our country's interests at home and abroad.

Part of this dramatic increase in obesity stems from a lack of physical activity. Only 8 percent of elementary schools, 6.4 percent of middle schools, and 5.8 percent of high schools provide daily physical education to all of its students.⁸⁶ This represents another disturbing trend that must be reversed in order to create a more reliable resource pool for military service.

Currently, the recruiting force makes an effort at the local level to partner with schools and conducts numerous physical activities that inspire short term physical activity.⁸⁷ What is lacking is a DoD sponsored and funded program allowing schools to

maintain a comprehensive physical education program. This is a critical area the military failed to address at a wholesale level, relying on the efforts of the roughly 15 thousand recruiters nationwide to implement short term tactical victories without any strategic vision existing at the national level.⁸⁸

From a historical perspective, this would not be the first time that the military led a foray into our nation's secondary schools to help produce a better citizen. The military established the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) as part of the National Defense Act of 1916.⁸⁹ According to Title 10, Section 2031 of the United States Code the purpose of JROTC is "to instill in students in secondary educational institutions the values of citizenship, service to the United States, and personal responsibility and a sense of accomplishment."⁹⁰ While not designed as a recruiting instrument, it does have powerful second order affects in assisting the recruiting effort. The Service Chiefs estimate that between 30-50 percent of those participating in the program go on to join the military.⁹¹ This further proves the relationship between military contact and enlistment propensity.

JROTC could serve as a valuable blueprint on how to establish a physical fitness experiment in our nation's secondary schools. In FY 2007 the military operated 3,229 individual service JROTC programs in high schools throughout the country at a cost of approximately \$340 million.⁹² Additional costs of the program are borne by the schools themselves and those estimates vary widely. Several organizations who oppose JROTC in our high schools estimate this additional cost at up to \$75,000 per program.⁹³ That would add an additional \$242 million to the overall cost of the program. A similar program targeted toward fitness could be established for roughly the same costs.

Those institutions already hosting JROTC programs could serve as the pilot program and if they show success, many other schools may wish to opt into the program in order to take advantage of the numerous benefits of a healthier student body. Again, it is a win-win situation. The military gets the access to the students and a much healthier resource pool, while schools receive a valuable source of funding and manpower that produces a healthier and better performing student body. This additional funding could be even more important in times of economic downturns when education budgets are tight.

Assuming DoD could maintain pilot program costs at roughly the same figures as those for JROTC, it would be a remarkably affordable method to increase our access to high schools while at the same time improving the health and qualification of the overall market. Even if we include the estimated costs that school districts pay for operating JROTC programs as additional funding requirements the total cost would still be well below \$1 billion.

Visionaries such as General Hershey recognized the need to adapt our populations to meet the national security needs of the nation. He saw the impact poor nutrition had on military readiness in World War II and helped in fundamentally changing the way our children ate at school. The primary benefit was not military readiness, but he recognized that long term maintenance of preparedness required changing the environment that produces our manpower rather than simply extracting what the market yields.

What is needed is a national level strategy that provides public schools with the means to ensure healthy students that are eligible for military service. Like ASVAB

testing, this program would be funded by DoD and implemented in partnership with the DoE. A program to enhance physical education in public schools could provide a much needed boost to the physical and emotional health of our nation's youth.

The urgency of the issue and the length of time required to produce sustainable results make it imperative that we begin the effort immediately. It would require the creation of a strong coalition to implement the program considering the various stakeholders required to approve and execute it. This type of inclusionary program may also help insulate the program from the inevitable criticism that would accompany it. Much of this criticism would probably center on the same issues that spur anti-recruiting efforts in our schools. In some minds the mere fact that the program was funded by DoD would make it unpalatable regardless of the obvious benefits.

This is an unfortunate fact of today's political landscape, but the benefits of developing a more healthy youth population would outweigh any possible public relations backlash. The data appears to indicate that if we could create a more qualified resource pool, we would have no trouble manning our force to the required levels. The 140,000 applicants turned away simply for failing to meet the weight standards upon entry indicate a more than willing, if unqualified subset of our society.

Legislation comparable to the National Defense Act of 1916 and the subsequent ROTC Vitalization Act of 1964 could establish and fund the program. Targeting areas hosting JROTC programs with high obesity rates would be an effective way to generate early victories to enhance the program's image and acceptability within the communities. The additional development of small pilot programs at secondary schools with significant military and community ties would allow the program to flourish and

generate the initial successes required for large scale implementation. The military services could then capitalize on these early triumphs to produce sustainable results on a nationwide level. The program, like JROTC, would be voluntary for schools. It is probable that, at a minimum, those schools with established JROTC programs would participate. This would provide a foothold at approximately 10-15 percent of our nation's schools.

Conclusions

Personnel will remain the cornerstone of the military. Many societal pressures influence the number of qualified applicants. The current recruiting force is ill prepared to sustain successful manning of the force over the long haul. The services remain too fixated on an extrication strategy of obtaining all that they can from an ever dwindling resource pool. The services not only compete with each other, but also the private sector, for the most sought after target market. Tough economic times make the job of recruiting more manageable, but they do not change the fundamental dynamics affecting our most vital resource.

The military must partner with other key stakeholders to develop a multi-pronged strategy that seeks not just to retrieve what the market will bear, but actually takes proactive steps to increase the number of qualified applicants. The current strategy of modifying or loosening self-imposed restrictions on the "quality" of our force, must give way to a comprehensive plan to improve the education and health of our nation's youth. We must recognize this as a national security issue and ensure that we place adequate resources against the requirement.

DoD must lead the effort and invest in their most valuable resource long before they reach the recruiting process and training base. We can no longer wait to make

significant changes in our policies for dealing with the people from which we are drawn. Failure to act now may lead to a catastrophic breakdown in the future.

Recommendations.

The Department of Defense and other policy makers must act now to ensure the future readiness of our society to support our national security strategy. This effort requires complete transparency between policy makers and the American people. This is especially vital when dealing with the sensitive issue of how our military interacts with the nation's youth. Every aspect of the program must be clearly defined and its relationship to our national security explained in detail. The U.S. normally responds to well articulated calls for increased readiness, especially when our way of life is threatened.

Congress must mandate compulsory ASVAB testing for all U.S. high school students by modifying the NCLB Act. A comprehensive strategy should involve initial pilot programs within communities with strong military ties and other selected high value recruiting markets as identified by the individual services. Success in these markets will provide case studies and lessons learned to allow for modification, test strategic communications and develop additional implementation guidance. It will also provide the impetus for nationwide application.

Initially it would be a voluntary program similar to the Solomon Act requiring compliance as a condition for acceptance of federal funds. Representative participation among all segments of society would be ensured by elimination of the opt-out option for all test applicants. DoD and DoE distribution of monetary awards for increased ASVAB participation and score improvement coupled with teacher bonuses and DoD grants to education should provide additional incentives for successful implementation. If

voluntary testing fails to produce the desired results, Congress must direct mandatory testing of all high school seniors as an adjunct to the registration provision of the current selective service system. Additionally, Congress must mandate minimum scores for both genders as a condition for certain federal aid and federal employment.

Many may view mandatory ASVAB as a means to militarize our nation's youth. We must incorporate a comprehensive strategic communication package clearly identifying education as a critical national security issue and improving education as our primary focus. Improved military readiness remains a valuable by-product of a highly educated society. In concert with this effort, DoD must continue to study the ASVAB's ability to meet educational and psychological testing standards and make appropriate modifications to the exam. One key recommendation would be to modify the nomenclature of the ASVAB to more accurately reflect its new scope and purpose and to further highlight its civilian applications.

The government must expand its efforts to increase the health and fitness of our nation's youth. As part of a comprehensive program, DoD should provide funds to school districts to allow them to maintain physical education programs at state and local levels. DoD would provide earmarked funds for health and fitness programs through the DoE and concentrate efforts in areas with high military populations. These initial pilot programs in military communities would work to increase interagency partnerships and help solidify bonds between our military forces and the youth market in their respective areas. They must also concentrate efforts in the regions producing the highest quality and largest volume of enlistment contracts as determined by the services, thus focusing limited resources in our most lucrative recruiting markets.

DoD could utilize the current JROTC program as the foundation of a nationwide health and fitness program funded and in some cases implemented by the military. Innovative legislation offering programs to increase the health and fitness of our youth specifically designed to reverse the alarming trend toward obesity among our military aged population should be well received by schools constantly pressed for adequate funding. A new ROTC Revitalization Act could either expand the mission of the current JROTC program or create an entirely new mission and vision solely focused on countering a critical national security shortfall; a population that is willing but too unhealthy to serve.

We must develop a strong strategic communication program that identifies the extent and severity of our educational and health issues and how they relate to our national security today and in the future. Then we must capitalize on incremental success in test score improvement and lower rates of obesity in order to develop a strategic policy for expansion of both programs.

If our military fails, our nation will most certainly fail. We can no longer maintain the fragile existence of the AVF without developing and implementing policies increasing the readiness of our citizens to serve. The problem goes beyond manning the AVF and our current operations against violent extremists throughout the world. The inability of our nation's youth to serve in the armed forces becomes even more pronounced in times of crisis when implementation of the selective service system must be considered. We must increase the readiness of our population to serve at all levels. The time to start is now. Failure to do so may cause irreparable damage to our national security in the very near future.

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⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ HQ USMEPCOM, ASVAB Career Exploration Strategy SY 10-11, 21.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Population Representation in the Military Services (2009).

⁵⁰ HQ USMEPCOM, ASVAB Career Exploration Strategy SY 10-11, 25.

⁵¹ USMEPCOM, ASVAB Career Exploration Strategy SY 10-11, 24.

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⁵⁶ Ibid, 4.

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⁶⁴ Counter-Recruitment, linked via Wikipedia at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counter-recruitment>, (accessed 15 Dec 2010).

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